

PUCCINI'S BOHEMIAN GIRL MAKES A CENTURY

La Bohème. It translates, literally, as the Bohemian girl. Her name is Mimi, she tells us shortly after her first entrance, and in the hundred years since she first carried her candle and her gentle demeanour into the garret and heart of the young poet Rodolfo, she has been singing her way into the affections of millions and millions of opera-lovers all over the world. She has certainly made her mark here in Dublin, where generation after generation of admirers have followed the course of her sad short life; and wet countless handkerchiefs in the process.

Puccini and his librettists based *La Bohème* on Henry Murger's novel *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*, which is set in the Latin quarter of Paris in the 1830s and deals with the lives and loves of four young men who eke out a precarious living from their respective callings as poet, painter, musician and philosopher. The opera, however, focuses on



Maria Spacagna

the romantic entanglements of two of them: the bitter-sweet romance of Rodolfo and his seamstress sweetheart Mimi; and the more rumbustious affair between the painter Marcello and his volatile girlfriend Musetta.

To mark the centenary of this ever-popular favourite, Opera Ireland is revising the Scottish Opera production which *Opera* magazine called:

WHATS IN A NAME?

OPERA IRELAND. Short; descriptive; and relevant. And how easy it is to say; far easier, certainly, than the cumbersome DGOS Opera Ireland that has served as a marketing name for the company in recent years.

"This change of name is a logical step in the process of transforming the company into a fully professional organisation", Chairman Frank O'Rourke says. "It gives us an identity which is suitable for our place in the world of modern opera. We are a part of an international music industry in which it is imperative that we have an instantly recognisable and logical name. DGOS, for all its historical and nostalgic significance, means very little outside Dublin."

The first name adjustment, from Dublin Grand Opera Society to DGOS Opera Ireland, was made four years ago in order to reflect the character change the company was undergoing at that time; moving from its status as an amateur society to a professionally managed and administered organisation, right across the spectrum of its activities.

"We tried to keep the DGOS there by putting it in the title", Frank O'Rourke explains. "We have always been known by that name, and probably always will. But now it has become a complication and causes great confusion in other parts of the world: 'What does it mean? What does it stand for?' and so on." He's right. To the older generation of Irish opera-goers, this company will always be DGOS. But expediency and marketing forces prevail and it's at least good to know that foreign agents and performers should now have less difficulty feeling at ease with the name of the Irish opera company they are dealing with.

"a winning *Bobème*, in scale, style and ensemble ... a visually beautiful production". Italian-American soprano Maria Spacagna sings the title role, as she has already done at the Metropolitan in New York and in Puccini's home town at Torre del Lago. A graduate of the new England Conservatory of Music, her career has taken her to the great opera houses on three continents. She was the first American to sing Butterfly at La Scala and at Torre del Lago, and she has repeated the role at The Met, in Munich, Berlin and other opera centres. Her wide range of roles includes Mozart's Countess; Verdi's Amelia (in *Boccanegra*), Violetta, Gilda, Luisa Miller and Lina (in *Stiffelio*); Maddelena in *Andrea Chenier*; Marguerite in *Faust*; and the title roles in Dvorák's *Rusalka* and Mascagni's *Lodoletta*. Next year she adds Verdi's *Aida* and the *Trovatore* Leonora to the roster.

Rodolfo is Italian tenor Maurizio Comencini. A regular guest with opera companies throughout Italy,

where he has concentrated on the great bel canto roles of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti, he has also sung at the Vienna State Opera and in Dresden, Hamburg and Palm Beach, where he made his USA debut in 1994 as Almaviva, returning earlier this year as Alfredo in *La traviata*. Two more Italians, baritones Armando Gabba as Marcello and Andrea Piccinni as Schaunard, join with Irish singers Kathryn Smith and Gerard O'Connor (*see page 3*) to complete the cast of this evergreen opera. American maestro Rico Saccani, whose recording of *Aida* with the NSO can be heard on Naxos CDs, conducts the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. The production, originally conceived by Elijah Moshinsky, is directed by Daniel Slater, who will also be in charge of Scottish Opera's revival in early 1997.

A PERFECT POTION

"Elisir di si perfetta"

Dulcamara, or The Little Duck and the Great Quack. That was what William S. Gilbert called his 1866 burlesque on Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. I'm not sure where the little duck comes in, other than as a prop for the pun; but Dulcamara, the peripatetic practitioner who dispenses cures for all ailments, is one of the great buffo roles in Italian opera. Donizetti's comic masterpiece has always been popular with Dublin audiences, who have wallowed in its unending stream of catchy tunes, most notably the tenor's plaintive "Una furtiva lagrima". But that's only the icing on a melodic cake that also has the tenor's other aria "Quanto è bella" and the finely spun "Prendi: per me sei libero", the duet in which Nemorino and Adina eventually reconcile their differences. Then there is Adina's sparkling account of the saga of Tristan and Isolde (or Tristano è Isotta as they become in Italian) and her barcarole with Dr Dulcamara. Add a plethora of lilting bucolic choruses and patter songs, and you have the perfect recipe for a charming night at the opera.

Felice Romani's libretto, a thing of rustic charm, tells the tale of Nemorino, a timid country lad who is too shy to declare his love for the attractive young widow Adina. For her part, she resents his reticence and deliberately arouses his jealousy by flirting with the bumptious militiaman Sergeant Belcore. Nemorino's thoughts turn to that elixir of

love which Adina was singing about and he thinks he is on to a good thing when he purchases what he believes to be just such a potion from the quack doctor Dulcamara. What he actually gets is a bottle of potent Bordeaux wine, which at least bolsters his courage sufficiently to make him more assertive, and ultimately successful, in his wooing.

Cork soprano Majella Cullagh, whose last appearance with the company was as Musetta in 1993 and whose Naxos recording of *Maritana* is due for release shortly, sings Adina. Roisín Toal, one of the Three Boys in last spring's *Magic Flute*, returns as the knowing village lass Gianetta. Nemorino is the young British tenor David Newman, whose repertoire includes, Nadir, Fenton, Faust and Ottavio and who will sing Rodolfo in the Scottish Opera revival of *La Bohème* mentioned above. Baritone Garry Magee, Winner of last year's Kathleen Ferrier Award, portrays the swaggering Sergeant Belcore; and the role of the quack doctor Dulcamara is sung by the famous English bass, Rodrick Earle.

This new Opera Ireland production of *L'elisir d'amore* has been designed by Bernard Culshaw and will be directed by Mike Ashman, whose thought-provoking production of *La Bohème* caused a stir 1987. The opera will be conducted by Mark Shanahan.

FOUR OF OUR OWN

Four of the leading roles in Opera Ireland's winter season at the Gaiety will be sung by Irish artists



Majella Cullagh

Majella Cullagh, who has previously appeared with Opera Ireland as Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1991 and as Musetta in 1993, sings the role of **Adina** in *L'elisir d'amore*. A native of Cork, Majella first studied there under Maeve Coughlan and then at the National Opera Studio in London. Her wide repertoire embraces roles in French, Italian, German and English operas from Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, in which she appeared for the English Bach Festival at the Royal Opera House, to Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and James Wilson's Swift opera *A Passionate Man*, in which she created the role of Vanessa in Dublin in 1995. At Wexford Festival the previous year she had sung Dorella in Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot* and last year she was Elsie Maynard in Welsh National Opera's production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*. Her most recent success was as the sorceress Melissa in Handel's *Amadigi* with Opera Theatre Company. She also appears extensively on the concert platform throughout Ireland and the UK and she sings the title role in the new Naxos recording of Wallace's *Maritana*.



Roisin Toal

Soprano Roisín Toal, who sings the role of **Gianetta** in *L'elisir d'amore*, was one of the three sprightly 'boys' in the acclaimed spring production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Born in Co. Armagh, she originally studied with Dr. Veronica Dunne at the DIT College of Music and currently works with répétiteurs David Wray and Patrick Zuk at the

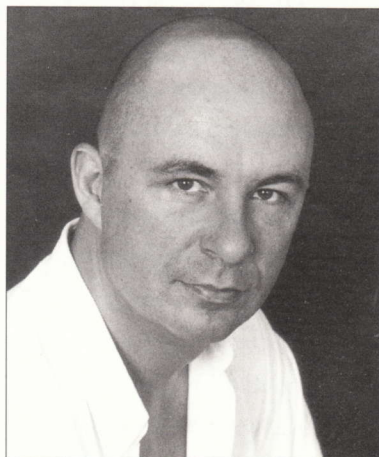
Leinster Opera Studio where she has participated in operatic excerpts from Italian, German, French and English operas. She currently sings in the National Chamber Choir and in Opera Ireland's professional chorus. In 1994 and 1995 she was a soloist with Phil Coulter on his nationwide tour and she has done a number of live and broadcast concert performances as well as commercial recordings.

Kathryn Smith, who is this year's **Musetta**, is a familiar and popular soprano who sings regularly at venues all over Ireland. In opera she has sung the title roles in *La traviata*, *Tosca* and *The Merry Widow* as well as Donizetti's Adina and Norina, all with English Touring Opera. For Scottish Opera she toured as Konstanze in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. She has appeared frequently on RTÉ and, more recently, BBC television as well as taking the singing role of Aida in Jim Sheridan's *Risen People* at the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin. At Kilkenny Arts Week in August she deputised at very short notice for the indisposed Ronan Tynan.



Kathryn Smith

Puccini wasn't over-generous when it came to writing for the lowest male voice. Timur in *Turandot*, Jake Wallace in *La fanciulla del West* and Colline in *La Bohème* are his only sizeable bass roles; and the latter's farewell to his coat, "Vecchia zimarra, seni", is the only self-contained aria allotted to any of them. Galway bass Gerard O'Connor will be singing the role of the philo-



Gerard O'Connor

sophic **Colline** at the Gaiety. Gerard, who was the first recipient of the Guinness Bursary at the National Opera School in London, sang the Bonze in Opera Ireland's *Madama Butterfly* in 1993, the year in which he also appeared in Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Wexford. Last year he doubled the roles of Badger and Parson in ONI's production of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* in Belfast and he has sung Alidoro in *La Cenerentola* at Castle Ward, The Abbot in *Curlew River* at the

Covent Garden Festival, Simone in *Gianni Schicchi* at Holland Park, and St John in the world premiere of James Wilson's *A Passionate Man* in Dublin. More recently he has toured Ireland, Belgium, Holland in OTC's *Zaide*; and sung in Tchaikovsky's *The Enchantress* at the Brighton Festival. This September he sings Devilshoof in RTÉ's concert version of *The Bohemian Girl* in Waterford and at the NCH in Dublin.

UNSUNG HEROES

The backstage people at Opera Ireland

Otello, Macbeth, Norma, Tosca ... these may be the names on the posters, but ask anyone involved in staging opera who the **real** heroes and heroines are and they'll soon tell you. The production team. That dedicated band of people who work long and hard to make sure that the production actually gets onto the stage **and** runs smoothly.

Eric Grattan is the man who directs and co-ordinates the Opera Ireland production team. "There's a team of people – the same people in the opera production team all the time." Many have several years' experience working with the company. "There's Sadie Cuffe, our wardrobe supervisor. She makes all the costumes. Kieran Murphy, who is our chief electrician. Donal Shiels, the company manager, who has a very difficult job – he keeps the cast and the directors happy. And of course, stagehands Mick Kelleher and Paddy Skelly, who have worked with the company since – I don't know. They're as old as the DGOS itself, they've seen it all!"

"We are lucky to have the most professional team of people I've ever come across. What makes the difference is the pride they all take in each production. They are extremely proud to be associated with Opera Ireland. Also, the fact that we work two short seasons, and not all year round, can help to create a buzz each season. Although, I'm sure people would take just as much pride if Opera Ireland was staging operas twelve months a year."

Eric Grattan works very much in tandem with Paul Foley. "He's my 'other half': Paul is co-production manager. He looks after most of the staging end of things." Planning begins six to nine months in advance, as soon as the up-coming productions have been decided. "Initially, I sit down with David Collopy to discuss budgets, then with the director and the designer, and make sure everyone is aware of the budget limitations, the size of the Gaiety stage, the safety requirements and so on. Some months later, the designer will show us a model of the set and we'll spend an afternoon discussing how everything will work. Then Paul and I get together and work out what crew we want, the position of the set and so on. I look after all the scheduling for each section of the crew and general overall budget control."

Budget is a word that crops up a lot in conversation with Eric Grattan. Now in his fourth season with the company, he freely admits that making the transition from the spoken theatre to opera has been something of a culture shock. "My first year with Opera Ireland was a complete eye-opener. I'd worked in theatre since the early eighties but was never involved in opera, although I did a lot of big musicals. But opera is so much more professional in every way – particularly with Opera Ireland where you have such strict budget controls." But aren't opera companies notorious for going over budget? "The size of our budget demands a highly disciplined approach from every member of the team. For example, the Opera Ireland set and costume budget is on average £26,000-£30,000 per production which would be the Royal Opera House's equivalent of petty cash!" Pretty impressive when you consider that this figure has to cover production costs for a project involving approximately one hundred and sixty people.

This season sees the introduction of **surtitles**. Is this an extra thing for Eric to worry about? "It is, to a certain extent. First of all, we have to get it to work! It's computer controlled and we're in the process of finding an operator. It's quite specialised – the operator needs to be able to read music and take the cues from a score. But technically, it doesn't create any real problems. We just need some extra rehearsal time to make sure it does work." Having to hire a set or take one from a co-production can be much more of a headache. "Absolutely ; because then we have to make it fit! The Gaiety stage is a very small stage and we're restricted from a storage point of view as well. In addition, backstage access can be a problem. The 'get-in'; it's called 'the get-in from hell', because everything has to be carried up a laneway! You can't get the trucks up to the stage door. So we tend to bring everything in at midnight, when it's reasonably peaceful." From that moment on, the production team works practically around the clock. "Basically, I live in the theatre from the time we get in there to the time we finish."

How do directors tend to react when they arrive and see the limited size of the Gaiety stage? "It can be a bit of a shock, but more often they're bowled over by the fact that the Gaiety is such a beautiful old theatre. When you stand on the stage first and look out at the auditorium, you can sense something special about it." Watching it all come together, on the first night of the run, Eric Grattan relaxes for the first time in weeks. "The biggest satisfaction is the opening night, when everything comes together. Unlike last nights, when you don't get time to relax. On each of the last nights, we work through until 5 am, taking down the sets, dismantling everything, putting it all into storage, doing the paperwork and so on."

A lot of backstage work during a run involves controlled chaos interspersed with periods of calm. When everything comes together at the right moment, the sense of satisfaction can be immense. "I think the biggest success from the production point of view was *The Magic Flute* in spring 1996. We built the set ourselves, we made all the costumes ourselves, there was no hire of anything whatsoever: and the opera itself was a major success. So everything just clicked together on that one."

Can we look forward to two equally successful productions this season? Eric Grattan and his team are quietly, if cautiously, optimistic. "It's such a good thing we've never had a major disaster – never. Touch wood we never will!"

Opera People:

MEETING FERGUS SHEIL

Attend almost any recital, concert, operatic performance or student production in the coming months and chances are you'll find the new Opera Ireland Chorus Master/Head of Music in the audience – and not just for the enjoyment of it. Fergus Sheil is a man with a mission: "I want to find the best young singers in Ireland to bring into the chorus, and not only for the chorus but also people who would be useful to the company for larger roles."

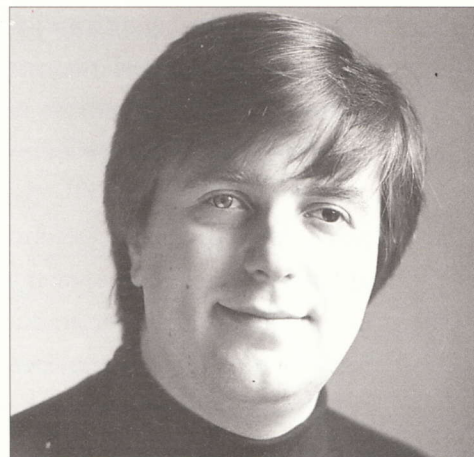
Spring 1996 was Fergus Sheil's first season as Chorus Master with Opera Ireland. Already experienced as a chorus master with the Wexford Festival and Opera Theatre Company, he is also an accomplished conductor, winner of last year's BRI Conducting Award in the UK. Now he adds the title Head of Music, Opera Ireland, to his responsibilities. So what will his new role entail? "That's a good question! Up to now, I've been chorus master for one season only. Now, I will be doing it on an ongoing basis, in every season. So I'm going to take an overview of the chorus and develop it. I'm looking forward to working with them over a period of some years, rather than just a couple of weeks."

But auditioning new chorus members is just the start of Fergus Sheil's job. He also has an input into choosing the principal singers for each season. "I'm on the auditioning panel and I have a say. So when the four conductors for the coming year are choosing the casts, I'll work with them and I'll be able to fill them in on the Irish scene. And I hope to play a constructive role in bringing my experience of Irish singers in particular to bear on the new Artistic Director, whoever that may be."

"In addition to that, I'll liaise with the conductors to make sure that the scores we're using are the right ones, that the orchestral parts are prepared properly, and so on. I'll also be a presence in every rehearsal, as far as possible. I'll be an adviser to the conductors; an adviser to all the singers; I'll give extra coaching as necessary."

Fergus Sheil also hopes to bring opera to a wider audience in the future and, at the same time, provide a stepping-stone for younger singers. As yet, there are no concrete plans – but the new Head of Music's head is buzzing with ideas! "Maybe I'll try to organise some concert versions of operas. Or mini-operas – something like that is what I'd like to see the company developing. And also operas in schools and things for younger children, to build

up an audience for opera. All these things I'll be trying to get off the ground in the next year or so."



Fergus Sheil

In an ideal world, Fergus Sheil would like to see the seasons expanded to include three operas per season. "This way, we can maintain the very popular operas, but also be able to explore the infrequently performed Verdi operas, the Russian repertoire, the German repertoire – such as Weber, for example. I'd like to work out ways of taking calculated risks. Because unless we do something other than the very popular operas, we're not going to build up audiences for anything other than those works. Unless the company leads the audience, the audience won't follow." Of course, this would take a lot more money to achieve, but Fergus Sheil is hopeful that company funding will continue to increase steadily over the next five to ten years. "This would allow us to have other strands to the company, like opera in concert and opera in educational fields. The greatest thing that could happen to the company would be for someone to build an opera house in Dublin. If Opera Ireland could own its own theatre, it would make an enormous difference to the company. I don't know if that can be achieved in five years' time!"

Coming back to this season, Fergus Sheil says we can look forward to two very different and interesting productions. "*La Bohème* is conducted by Rico Saccani and he has chosen a cast of Italian singers who have sung the opera many times before, often with him, for the four main roles. And, in conjunction with him, we have chosen the other roles. So it's going to be a very Italian sound."

"The contrast to that is going to be *L'elisir d'amore*, because conductor Mark Shanahan has chosen a cast of people who have never sung the opera before – all five main roles. The type of voice he wanted – and I'm very excited about this – is that of younger singers. Young, fresh voices: people like Majella Cullagh, who sings Adina. I think it's going to be something very special."

As he steps in to his new dual role as Chorus Master and Head of Music, Fergus Sheil is quick to point out that, in opera, no matter how carefully you

plan, things will never turn out exactly as you envisaged. "You never know until you get into rehearsal what's going to happen. It's one of the mysteries. You can be sure in opera that two plus two does not equal four: it might be five, it might

be three, but it's never four!" As his smile widens, it's obvious that this prospect fills Fergus with excited anticipation, rather than with dread. Like him, we can't wait to see how his plans turn out.



Sopranos Niamh O'Brien and Elizabeth Woods, flank Marina Levitt (Pamina) in the Opera Ireland spring production of The Magic Flute.

A CHOIR FOR ALL SEASONS

A recently concluded contract between Opera Ireland and the National Chamber Choir ensures that the choir's seventeen members will in future form the nucleus of the company's opera chorus.

The National Chamber Choir, which achieved its ambition to become a full-time professional body this year – the only one in the country – was founded in 1991. Although still relatively young as choirs go, it has already made a considerable impact on audiences and critics alike through its many radio and television broadcasts and its participation in concerts with the major orchestras.

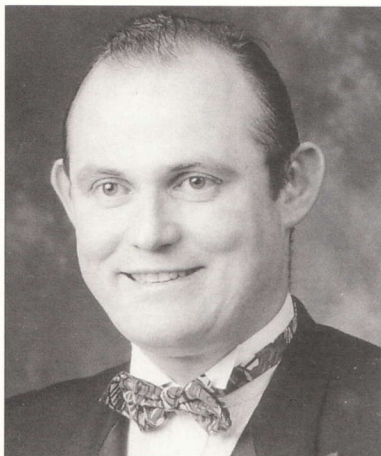
The choir, plainly a versatile one, is also involved in the lucrative business of recording backing tracks for the record and film industry while at the same time finding time to participate in the vital business of music education in schools around the country. Earlier this year the choir's young members were the proud recipients of the top award in the Arts and Communications category of the AIB Better Ireland Awards.

Since 1995, the National Chamber Choir has been Choir in Residence at Dublin City University, a situation that has made a significant impact on the present security and future development of the group.

The choir is structured on a two-tier basis: ten of the singers are on renewable contracts and the other seven are on three to four-year non-renewable contracts. This ensures a balance between continuity and a constant supply of places for emerging young singers who want to pursue their careers in Ireland. In addition to the contract with Opera Ireland, the choir's full-time professional status is maintained by grant aid from the Arts Council, an on-going arrangement with RTE which accounts for almost half of its annual work, and continuing support from its loyal supporters.

STANDING TALL

Regina Kealy talks with Kilkenny tenor Ronan Tynan



Ronan Tynan

Imagine this. An 18-year-old tenor with a range of three octaves – higher than most trebles – and a delicate, floating top to the voice that makes people quiver. All this without a singing lesson to his name. What happens to this young tenor? “At eighteen, I realised that a man should make a man’s sound –

so I stopped singing completely.” Luckily, for us, he started again with a more mature sound, four years later, and this time Ronan Tynan has not been able to stop. Granted, it was another seven years before he even thought of having the voice trained. By that time, he was in his fifth year studying medicine. Did he know what he was letting himself in for? “I knew nothing. I didn’t even know what a top C was!”

Success came almost immediately, with the Tenor prize and the John McCormack Cup at the Feis Ceoil, after just twenty lessons with Veronica Dunne. Four years later, following postgraduate study at the Royal Northern College in Manchester and with several international competitions under his belt, Tynan is preparing to embark on an operatic career. France, South Africa and the United States are all beckoning, while the list of Irish engagements is mounting up fast.

It sounds almost too easy. In reality, it was anything but. Tynan knows all too well what it feels like to be up against it. “I was born with my feet splayed and they tried to correct it. Then, I had a bad accident – a motorbike accident.” As a result of the accident, both legs had to be amputated and Tynan learned to walk with artificial limbs. Despite the difficulties, he believes that this should not prevent him having a successful stage career. “It doesn’t put me off. My point is, it’s the voice they

come to hear. Forget the ears, forget the body, it’s the voice. And I sing with total heart. Okay, not everything is in place – I know that. I’m not a fool. But somewhere along the line, I know I’ll get every single note I want. And I sing with my soul as well as with my heart.”

A lot of this confidence came from the experience of working with gifted teachers at the Royal Northern College. “They worked individually on me to get me confident about walking in front of mirrors.” His voice was also developing. “I worked with an Australian tenor, Anthony Roden. He got the voice beginning to flow naturally. But there was still something missing.” The story of Tynan’s quest to improve his technique and unleash the full power of the voice is a bit like a spy thriller.

In Ireland, he had always been told he was a light lyric tenor. “I sang in the European finals of the Pavarotti Competition in Modena. When Pavarotti heard me, he said: ‘Beautiful voice, but you’re not using it! Look at you, big man: big voice. No tenorino!’ ”

Pavarotti’s reaction confirmed Tynan’s own feeling that he needed to find the right support for the voice, the right technique, to fulfil his potential. Attending master classes in Munich, he encountered Soto Papulcas. “He had all this technique that was wonderful for me to work with. And he was big into support. And that’s what I learned from him – support.” In January 1996, Tynan reached the finals of the Francesco Vinãs competition in Spain. “After the second round, Eva Marton’s husband came up to me and said: ‘You know, you’re a big man, your voice can be bigger.’ ” He recommended that Tynan study technique with James McCray in Yugoslavia. When McCray heard Tynan sing, he said to him: “This is a huge voice”. Far from being a light tenor, Tynan was in fact a true lyric tenor. “And as the voice develops, I can see it becoming lirico spinto – there’s weight coming in. Right now, I’m trying to keep it out as much as I can.”

One reason for this is the number of lyric roles he longs to play. *Bohème* definitely – Rodolfo; *Tosca*

– Cavaradossi; *Manon* – oh, if somebody gave me *Des Grieux* in *Manon* I would just adore it!” The list goes on: “*Nabucco* – Ishmaele – lovely role. A role I’d love, and I’m well able for it, the Duke in *Rigoletto*. Rodolfo in *Luisa Miller*, really gutsy singing. *Carmen* – Don José – but I’m not ready to do *Carmen* yet.” What about Alfredo in *Traviata*? “I’d love it. I sang “Parigi, o cara” with Suzanne Murphy for a Tribute to Verdi and I adored it. I could just feel - oh, this is beautiful.”

Unlike many tenors, Ronan Tynan is quick to sing the praises of every soprano he has worked with. “They’re all wonderful. Each one has a uniqueness.” Top of the list must come Michie Nakamaru, the young Japanese artist who sang Butterfly to Tynan’s Pinkerton at the Proms last May. “Michie was wonderful to me. She said: ‘Your first time to sing Pinkerton?’; and I thought: ‘Oh God, is it that obvious?’ But I immersed myself in the role.” With only five days’ rehearsal, *Madama Butterfly* was important for Tynan in proving to other people, more than to himself, that he could be totally at ease in operatic roles. “I can sing most operas easily, provided the directors don’t want me to be jumping around all over the place the whole time.”

He has already overcome a fairly significant costuming hurdle. “In France, when we were rehearsing for Bizet’s *La jolie fille de Perth* – a production which is to be staged at the Theatre Français-Compiègne in 1997 and which Tynan was offered after his success in the International Singing Festival of Marmande – they wanted me to wear a kilt. I thought – a kilt? How in God’s name am I going to manage this?” How did he manage it? “I got a pair of big woolly socks and a long kilt. and it was fine. The director said to me: ‘It’s perfect. You are a blacksmith, you have to be ugly!’”

Tynan has developed a strong working relationship with conductor Proinnsias Ó Duinn. “His whole style, his gentleness, his artistry intrigues me.” They met when Tynan auditioned for RTE during his intern year of medicine. “Proinnsias was brilliant to me, so supportive.” In fact, it was Proinnsias Ó Duinn who wrote Tynan’s reference for entry to the RNCM in Manchester.

What now? The voice is still growing and Tynan is hungry to get his teeth into more operatic roles.

“After Pinkerton, people said they thought the voice was far more rounded and they liked the sound.” Opera companies in France, Cape Town, Atlanta and Pittsburgh have approached him recently. “I need opportunity, but it’s an interesting situation. Agents don’t know whether they want me or not. You see, with the limbs, you don’t know where you stand!”

Right now, Tynan stands on the threshold of an international career. Whether he makes it or not will depend on how much opera management’s are willing to take a chance with an exciting voice and highly committed, unique performer.

“People said to me: ‘You’re mad to have given up medicine. I’m not. I’m not. I’m just too intoxicated with the other stuff – the sheer joy of singing!’”

(Ronan Tynan appears at the National Concert Hall, Dublin on October 3, October 19 and November 14; and at The Point Depot on November 23 and 24. He sings the role of Parpignol in Opera Ireland’s *La Bobème* at the Gaiety in Nov/Dec)

BENELLI RETURNS

The celebrated Italian tenor Ugo Benelli will be back in Dublin in the spring to sing the comic role of Don Basilio in Opera Ireland’s production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. Benelli, who first sang here as Elvino in Bellini’s *La sonnambula* in 1962 and appeared frequently in both Dublin and Wexford during the ensuing decades, has extended his distinguished career in the world’s leading opera centres by taking on character roles in recent times. And the role of the seedy music master in Mozart’s opera is one of his most acclaimed assumptions in this field.

IRISH OPERA DIARY

Autumn/Winter 1996/97

Information as available on 1 September, 1996

Opera Northern Ireland

Belfast, Grand Opera House

Booking (081232) 241919

Sept 14, 18, 20, 7.30 pm.

(At Sept 18 performance, words and music will be signed for the hard of hearing by Wendy Ebsworth)

FIDELIO (Beethoven – in English)

Suzanne Murphy, Kate Ladner, John Horton Murray, Philip Sheffield, Keith Latham, Philip O'Reilly, Norman Bailey; c. Stephen Barlow; p. Matthew Francis; d. Isabella Bywater

Sept 15, 17, 19, 21, 7.30 pm

LA TRAVIATA (Verdi)

Rebecca Caine, Richard Coxon, David Barrell; c. Martin André; p. Stephen Medcalf; d. Isabella Bywater.

Opera Theatre Company

Booking (01) 679 4962

Gorey, Theatre Hall, Sept 14, 8 pm

Kilkenny, Watergate Theatre, Sept 17, 8 pm

Longford, Back Stage Theatre, Sept 19, 8.30 pm

Ballinasloe, Town Hall Theatre, Sept 21, 8 pm

Dublin, Samuel Beckett Theatre, TCD, Sept 24, 25, 27, 28, 8 pm

Sligo, Hawk's Well Theatre, Oct 1, 8 pm

Tuam, The Mall Theatre, Oct 3, 8 pm

Inis Oírr, An Halla, Oct 5, 8 pm

Limerick, Beltable Theatre, Oct 8, 8 pm

Skibbereen, Town Hall, Oct 10, 8 pm

Tralee, Siamsa Tíre, Oct 12, 8 pm

KATYA KABANOVA (Janáček – in English)

Regina Hanley, Kathleen Tynan, Frances McCafferty, Declan Kelly, James Drummond Nelson, Iain Paton; Piano accompaniment Dearbhla Collins; p. James Conway; d. Frank McHugh.

RTÉCO

Waterford RTC

Sept 20, 8 pm

Dublin, NCH

Sept 21 and 22, 8 pm

THE BOHEMIAN GIRL (Balfe – concert version)

Mary Hegarty, Katherine Henderson, Adrian Martin, Emmanuel Lawlor, Frank O'Brien, Gerard O'Connor; c. Proinnsias Ó Duinn.

Barra Ó Tuama Opera Gala

Cork City Hall

Sept 26, 8 pm

Dublin, National Concert Hall

Sept 28, 8 pm

Orla Boylan, Gabriel Sadé, Igor Morozov; Accompanist Christopher McManus.

Wexford Festival Opera

Wexford, Theatre Royal

Booking (053) 22144

Oct 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, Nov 1, 8 pm

PARISINA (Donizetti)

Alexandrina Pendatchanska, Daniella Barcellona, Amadeo Moretti, Roberto Servile, Richard Robson; c. Maurizio Benini; p. Stefano Vizioli; d. Ulderico Manani.

Oct 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, Nov 2, 8 pm

L'ETOILE DU NORD (Meyerbeer)

Elizabeth Futral, Darina Takova, Juan Diego Florez, Arutun Kochinian; c. Wladimir Jurowski; p. & d. Denis Krief.

Oct 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, Nov 3, 8 pm

SÁRKA (Fibich)

Svetelina Vassileva, Denisa Slepkovska, Ludowit Ludha, Anatoly Lochak, Richard Robson; c. David Agler; p. Inga Levant; d. Charles Edwards.

Opera South (IORC)

Cork Opera House

Booking (021) 270022

Oct 30, Nov 1 and 3

CARMEN (Bizet)

Annika Skoglund, Fiona O'Reilly, Dominic Natoli, Robert Mackenzie, Gerard O'Connor; c. Frank Buckley; p. John O'Flynn; d. Pat Murray.

Lyric Opera

Dublin, National Concert Hall

Booking (01) 671 1533

November 2 and 3, 7.70 pm

DIE FLEDERMAUS (Strauss – semi-staged, in English)

Virginia Kerr, Kathryn Smith, Stephen Wallace, Ivan Sharpe, Khosrow Mahsoori, Pat Doherty, Eugene Armstrong, Tony Finnegan; Party guests, Hinge and Brackett; St Cecilia Orch, c. Aidan Faughy; p. Vivian Coates.

Barra Ó Tuama Opera Gala

Cork City Hall

Nov 21, 8 pm

Dublin, National Concert Hall

Nov 23, 8 pm

Anda-Louise Bogza, José Azócar, Marcin Bronikowski; Accompanist Alastair Dawes.

Opera Ireland

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre

Booking (01) 677 1717

Nov 27, 29, Dec 1, 3, 5, 7, at 7.30 pm

LA BOHEME (Puccini)

Maria Spacagna, Kathryn Smith, Maurizio Comencini, Armando Gabba, Andrea Piccinni, Gerard O'Connor; c. Rico Saccani; p. Daniel Slater.

Dec 2, 4, 6, 8, 7.30 pm

L'ELISIR D'AMORE (Donizetti)

Majella Cullagh, Roisín Toal, David Newman, Garry Magee, Roderick Earle; c. Mark Shanahan; p. Mike Ashman; d. Bernard Culshaw.

Barra Ó Tuama Opera Gala

Dublin, National Concert Hall

Jan 25, 8 pm

Limerick, University Concert Hall

Jan 29, 8 pm

City Hall, Cork

Feb 1, 8 pm

Cara O'Sullivan, Roberto Aronica, Mario Giossi.

Opera Theatre Company

Booking (01) 679 4962

Wexford, Theatre Royal, Feb 8, 8 pm

Athlone, venue tba, Feb 11, 8 pm

Derry, venue tba, 8 pm

Dublin, RDS, Feb 21 and 22, 8 pm

Galway, Town Hall Theatre, Feb 25, 8 pm

Dundalk, Town Hall, Feb 27, 8 pm
Tralee, Siamsa Tíre, Mar 1, 8 pm
Limerick, Belltable Arts Centre, Mar 4, 8 pm
Kilkenny, Watergate Theatre, Mar 6, 8 pm
Cork, Everyman Palace Theatre, Mar 8, 8 pm

IL MONDO DELLA LUNA (Haydn – in a new English version as *Life on the Moon*)

Majella Cullagh, Colette McGahon, James Drummond Nelson, Harry Nicoll, Christopher Purves; c. tba; p. Hilary Westlake.

Barra Ó Tuama Opera Gala

Dublin, National Concert Hall

Feb 28, 8 pm

Limerick, University Concert Hall

Mar 5, 8 pm

City Hall, Cork

Mar 8, 8 pm

Barbara Kilduff, Tito Beltran, Nicholas Folwell; Accompanist Brenda Hurley.

Opera Northern Ireland

Belfast, Grand Opera House

Booking (081232) 241919

March 8 to 15

MADAMA BUTTERFLY (Puccini)

Details to be announced

Barra Ó Tuama Opera Gala

Limerick, University Concert Hall

April 3, 8 pm

City Hall, Cork

Apr 5, 8 pm

Dublin, National Concert Hall

Booking (01) 671 1533

Apr 9, 8 pm

Virginia Kerr, José Cura; Piano accompanist Alistair Dawes

Opera Ireland

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre

Booking (01) 677 1717

April 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 7.30 pm

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO (Mozart)

Cast to be announced; c. Simon Joly; p. Michael McCaffery.

April 6, 8, 10, 12, 7.30 pm

MACBETH (Verdi)

Cast to be announced; c. Alexander Anissimov; p. Dieter Kaegi; d. Bruno Schwengl.

LOOKING UP

Forget about trying to follow the plot of the opera by torchlight, or picking it up from well-meant but annoying whispered asides. A new and exciting innovation at this winter's season at the Gaiety will be the first-ever use of surtitles in opera in Dublin.

Surtitles are the theatrical equivalent of the subtitles used in cinema and television, but with the words projected above rather than below the action. What happens is that English translations of the words being sung or spoken on the stage are projected onto a slim screen situated high up at the front of the proscenium. While titles of one sort or another were occasionally used in the theatre in the past, the present system of projection has been around only since 1983, when the Canadian Opera Company first introduced it in Toronto.

Critical reaction to surtitles has always been very mixed – the editor of *Opera* magazine hates them – but they were immediately popular with the general opera public and their use has become increasingly prevalent. There are even places, let it be whispered, where in vernacular performances they are used to project the actual sung words, not translations.

The surtitles in the Gaiety will be produced by state-of-the-art technology which has been purchased jointly by Opera Ireland and Opera Northern Ireland. It is a computerised system developed specially for use in opera by the Danish Focon company and it has already proved its efficiency in most of the major British opera houses.

SPOTTING THE TALENT

Music critics, bless them, can be an awful thorn in our sides when their reviews don't happen to coincide with our own authoritative views on the merits or otherwise of particular performance. But sometimes, you know, they do get it right. Some of them even get it right long before anybody else. The *Irish Times* critic Michael Dervan was certainly on the ball when he wrote the following about one of the singers at the Belvedere Prizewinners concert at Wexford in 1990:

The strongest impression was made by Angela Gheorghiu, whose ability to combine creaminess of

tone with impassioned expression in “Chi il bel sogno di Doretta” from Puccini's *La rondine* generated a frisson unmatched by anything in the two nights of opera that had preceded the recital.

Ms Gheorghiu also displayed a fine sense of line, nicely unmannered in inflection, and had an ability to float high notes with an effortlessness that had one willing her to do it just one more time.

Nice one, Mr Dervan!

LEARNING TO ENJOY OPERA

This winter and spring, Opera Ireland and the Royal Irish Academy of Music join forces to present THE ENJOYMENT OF OPERA, a series of twelve two-hour lectures by John Allen. Illustrated with copious musical excerpts, the lectures are aimed at enhancing the experience of listening to opera, either in the theatre or at home, as well as giving an insight into opera's structure and history.

The lectures, which John has already given very successfully at University College Cork in association with Opera South (IORC), will take place at the RIAM in Westland Row over two terms of six weekly lectures, commencing on Tuesday 15 October. The spring term begins on Tuesday 18 February. The final lecture in each session is scheduled for the week before Opera Ireland's season and will be devoted to a pre-season talk on the relevant operas.

Lecture 1 Beyond the three tenors:

The dramatic background to some popular operatic numbers – communicating the story in opera – ... and a concise history of early opera.

Lecture 2 Amadeus in the theatre:

The principal operas of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, from *Idomeneo* to *La clemenza di Tito*, including his great trio of Italian comedies: *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*.

Lecture 3 Tales of Gothic horror:

Romantic German opera from Beethoven's *Fidelio* to the early works of Richard Wagner, taking in the works of Weber, Marschner, Lortzing and others.

Lecture 4 A half-century of bel canto:

Italian opera during the first half of the 19th century, a period dominated by three influential composers; Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini and Gaetano Donizetti.

Lecture 5 Enter the magician from Busetto:

The operas of Giuseppe Verdi. Verdi wrote 28 operas, starting with *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio* in 1839 and finishing with *Falstaff* in 1893.

Lecture 6 A pre-season look at Puccini's *La Bohème* and Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*

Lecture 7 La belle époque:

19th century French opéra (both grand and comique), from Boieldieu to Massenet, taking in the stage works of Auber, Meyerbeer, Adam, Berlioz, Thomas, Gounod, Saint-Saëns and Bizet.

Lecture 8 Squaring up to *The Ring*:

Wagner's mature music dramas, from *Der fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*, 1843) to *Parsifal* (1892) – including a beginner's guide to the four-part *Der Ring des Nibelungen* cycle.

Lecture 9 Nessun dorma:

Verismo opera at the turn of the century. The operas of Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Giordano, Puccini, Cilea and others.

Lecture 10 Looking East:

A look at the works of some Czech and Russian composers of opera.

Lecture 11 The story so far:

Opera in the 20th century: a wide-ranging selection of operas from Richard Strauss to Benjamin Britten and Karlheinz Stockhausen – taking in some weird and wonderful examples of passing musical styles.

Lecture 12 A pre-season look at Verdi's *Macbeth* and Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*

Admission to all lectures is free for Patrons/Friends of Opera Ireland. Subject to availability. The fee for non-members is £75 for the full course. Details of enrolment will be available shortly. Members should apply direct to Opera Ireland.

SPECIAL CD OFFER

Opera Ireland members are offered a saving on the Naxos recordings of *La Bohème*, *L'elisir d'amore* and *Maritana**

La Bohème, which was recorded in 1990, features the exciting Bratislava soprano Luba Orgonasova in the title role and American tenor Jonathan Welch as Rodolfo. Musetta is the Italian Carmen Gonzales, who once sang Mignon with DGOS, and her compatriot Fabio Prevati sings Marcello.

Star tenor Vincenzo La Scola tops the all-Italian cast as Nemorino in the brand new recording of Donizetti's comic opera. His co-stars are Alessandra Ruffini (Adina), Mariangela Spatorno (Gianetta), Simone Alaimo (Dulcamara) and Roberto Frontali (Belcore)

Opera Ireland's Adina, meanwhile, stars as Maritana in the new Naxos/RTÉ recording of Wallace's once very-popular opera. Lynda Lee sings the trouser role of Lazarillo; Paul Charles Clarke is the tenor hero Don Caesar de Bazan and Ian Caddy portrays the villainous Don José. The orchestra is the RTÉCO and the performance is conducted by Proinnsias Ó Duinn.

The three 2CD sets, which can be purchased together or separately, are available from:
COSMIC SOUNDS, 1a Farmhill Road, Dublin 14.

Each opera comes on a 2CD set and is available at the special discount price of £10, including packaging and posting.

* The *Maritana* set is scheduled for release in late Autumn.



NEWS

Published September and February

EDITOR:
Contributor:

John Allen
Regina Kealy (*Standing tall,
Unsung heroes; Fergus Sheil*)

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